MARJORIE LIU
SANA TAKEDA
MONSTRESS
image
ISSUE 7

THE MONSTRESS STORY SO FAR...

In the aftermath of a terrible war, tensions between the Federation of Man and the supernatural Arcanic hybrids remain high. Maika Halfwolf, an Arcanic teen and war survivor, thrust herself into the center of that conflict when she broke into the stronghold of the Cumaea, a human religious order that slaughters Arcanics to harvest the precious lilium that flows through their bodies. There, Maika obtained a photograph and a fragment of a mask that might provide answers about the murder of her mother.

Maika has been on the run ever since, hunted by representatives of every faction -- including the mysterious Arcanic Dusk Court and the Cumaean Mother Superior, whose body harbors an ancient evil. But Maika has persevered, fighting off her pursuers with the help of her greatest secret, and greatest burden: a creature called a Monstrum that lives inside of her and hungers for flesh. After seemingly destroying the Mother Superior at the cost of the rest of her own left arm, Maika escaped with her companions Kippa and Master Ren to the city of Thyria, where she intends to continue her quest for her late mother's secrets.

THE PLAYERS...

MAIKA An Arcanic teen who survived the Great War, and slavery at the hands of the Cumaean witch nuns. Ruthless and haunted, she is determined to uncover the truth behind her mother's murder — and her mother's secrets — in the hope that she can free herself from an ancient and dangerous god called a Monstrum that is imprisoned inside her body and fills her with an otherworldly hunger for human flesh. In her current possession are two clues to her past: a photograph, and a fragment of a mask that many would kill to possess.

MONSTRUM A mysterious, primordial being of tremendous power that shares Maika's body and mind, and fights her for control. Once considered a god, and drawn into this world by the Shaman-Empress, this Monstrum is driven by a deadly hunger, consuming the lives of humans and Arcanics alike, leaving only their desiccated corpses behind. Though it may give the impression that its only wish is to survive, there's far more to this creature, and its desires, than meets the eye…

REN An enigmatic nekomancer cat with mysterious motives, he is one of Maika's companions on her journey, and perhaps an agent of the Dusk Court — or some greater power.

KIPPA An Arcanic fox girl saved from slavery by Maika. Innocent and optimistic, she is frightened by the Monstrum — but trusts Maika and will bravely defend her and others by rushing into battles too dangerous for a child.

THE WARLORD OF THE DAWN COURT The military leader of the largest Arcanic faction. Also known as the Sword of the East, she seeks the mysterious weapon that destroyed the city of Constantine and ended the Great War. The Warlord is certain that this weapon will save the Arcanic race from its human enemies.

MORIKO Maika's mother, an Arcanic, whose obsession with uncovering the secrets of the greatest Arcanic ancestor, the Shaman-Empress, led to her betrayal and murder. Her reputation as a woman of single-minded drive and intellectual brilliance has only grown since her death.

MONKEY KING A sly member of the Dawn Court, and ally to the Warlord — for the moment.

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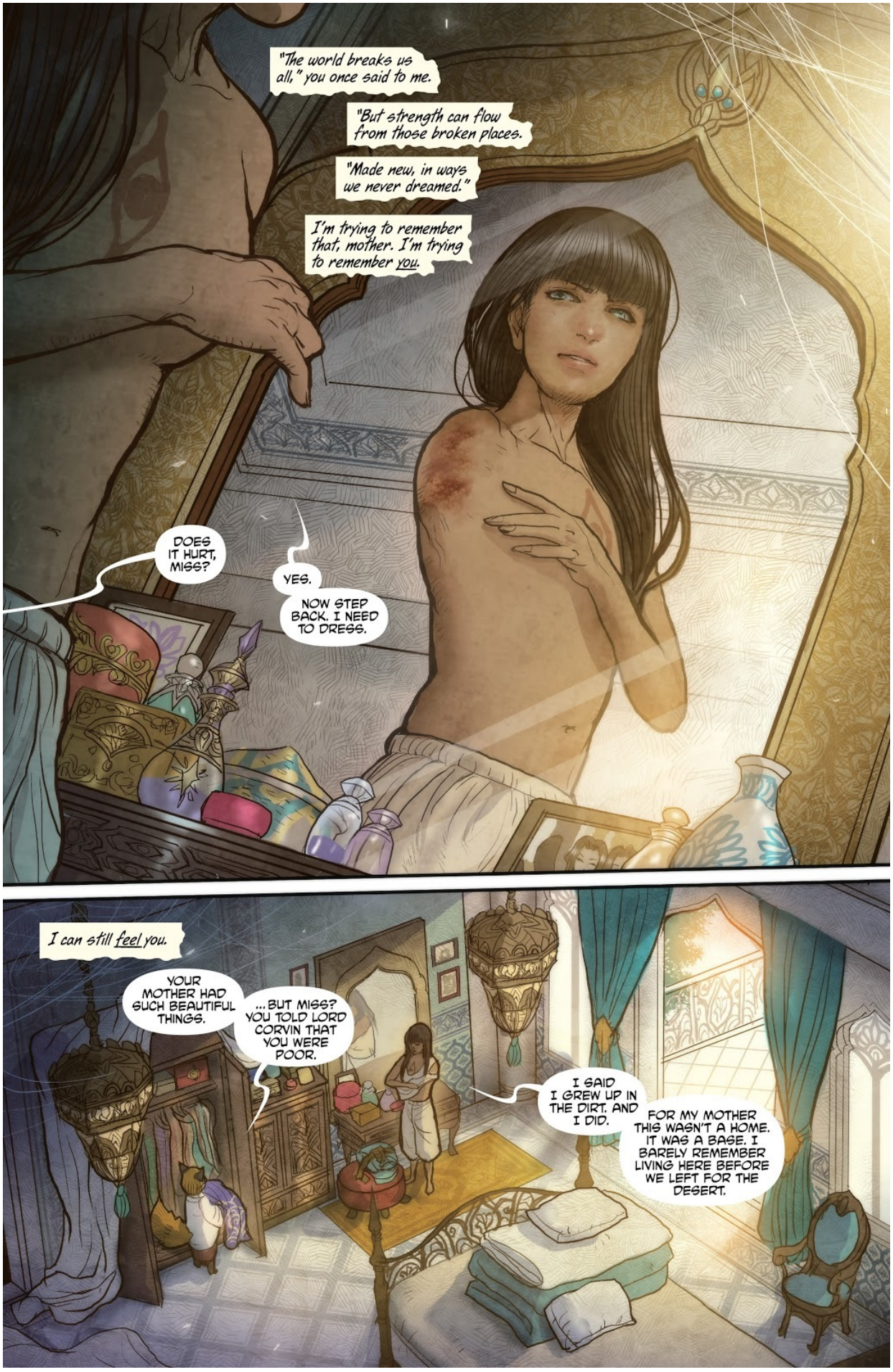
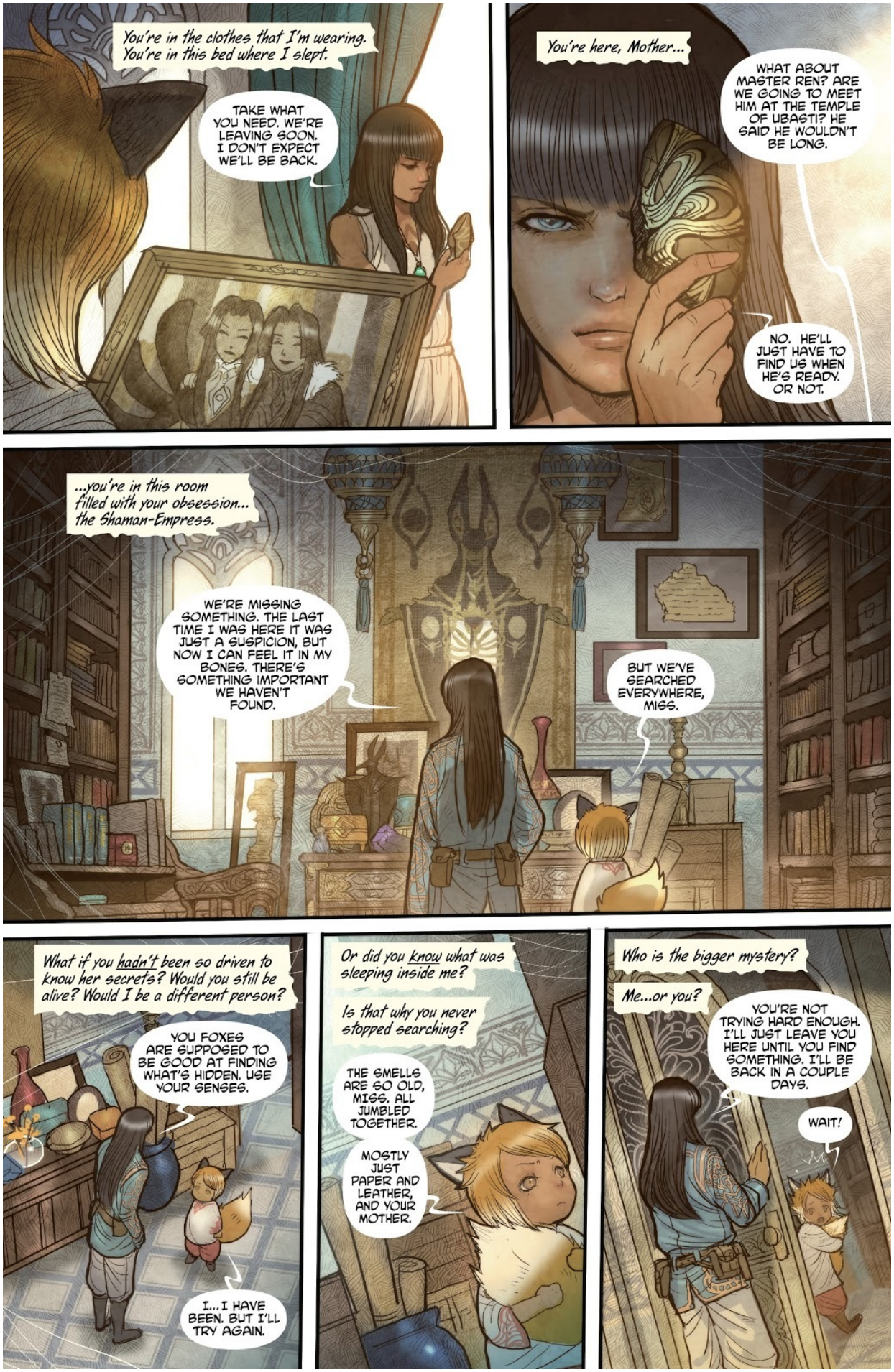
"OH.
"IT'S JUST... I HEARD PEOPLE TALKING BENEATH THE WINDOW THIS MORNING.
"THEY SAID... A MONSTER HAD SLAUGHTERED SHEEP DOWN BY THE DOCKS.
"I WONDERED...
"... IF YOU'D GOTTEN... *HUNGRY.*"
"YOU WANT TO KNOW IF THE MONSTER IS AWAKE."

THYRIA. MOST BELOVED CITY OF THE WAVE EMPRESS.
"YES, MISS. I HAVEN'T SEEN IT SINCE THE BATTLE WITH THE WITCHES."
"THAT'S BECAUSE IT'S SLEEPING AGAIN."
MOTHERFUCKER.
ARE YOU REALLY ASLEEP?
IF YOU CAN HEAR ME...YOUR DAYS ARE NUMBERED. I'M GOING TO TEAR YOU OUT OF ME IF IT'S THE LAST THING I DO.
I SWEAR AN OATH ON IT.


"The world breaks us all," you once said to me.
"But strength can flow from those broken places.
"Made new, in ways we never dreamed."
I'm trying to remember that, mother. I'm trying to remember you.
DOES IT HURT, MISS?
YES.
NOW STEP BACK. I NEED TO DRESS.
I can still feel you.
YOUR MOTHER HAD SUCH BEAUTIFUL THINGS.
...BUT MISS? YOU TOLD LORD CORVIN THAT YOU WERE POOR.
I SAID I GREW UP IN THE DIRT. AND I DID.
FOR MY MOTHER THIS WASN'T A HOME. IT WAS A BASE. I BARELY REMEMBER LIVING HERE BEFORE WE LEFT FOR THE DESERT.


You're in the clothes that I'm wearing. You're in this bed where I slept.
TAKE WHAT YOU NEED. WE'RE LEAVING SOON. I DON'T EXPECT WE'LL BE BACK.
You're here, Mother...
WHAT ABOUT MASTER REN? ARE WE GOING TO MEET HIM AT THE TEMPLE OF UBASTI? HE SAID HE WOULDN'T BE LONG.
NO. HE'LL JUST HAVE TO FIND US WHEN HE'S READY. OR NOT.
...you're in this room filled with your obsession... the Shaman-Empress.
WE'RE MISSING SOMETHING. THE LAST TIME I WAS HERE IT WAS JUST A SUSPICION, BUT NOW I CAN FEEL IT IN MY BONES. THERE'S SOMETHING IMPORTANT WE HAVEN'T FOUND.
BUT WE'VE SEARCHED EVERYWHERE, MISS.
What if you hadn't been so driven to know her secrets? Would you still be alive? Would I be a different person?
YOU FOXES ARE SUPPOSED TO BE GOOD AT FINDING WHAT'S HIDDEN. USE YOUR SENSES.
I...I HAVE BEEN. BUT I'LL TRY AGAIN.
Or did you know what was sleeping inside me?
Is that why you never stopped searching?
THE SMELLS ARE SO OLD, MISS. ALL JUMBLED TOGETHER.
MOSTLY JUST PAPER AND LEATHER, AND YOUR MOTHER.
Who is the bigger mystery?
Me...or you?
YOU'RE NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH. I'LL JUST LEAVE YOU HERE UNTIL YOU FIND SOMETHING. I'LL BE BACK IN A COUPLE DAYS.
WAIT!

MISS! COME BACK! DON'T LEAVE ME!
ONLY IF YOU FOUND SOMETHING.
THERE. THAT SPOT. THAT'S THE ONLY PLACE THAT'S DIFFERENT.
IT SMELLS LIKE... THE SEA.
WHY DID YOU DO THAT? WHY DID YOU SCARE ME?
SOMETIMES WE HAVE TO BE PUSHED IF WE'RE GOING TO BE OUR BEST.
WHAM
CRACK
FUCK IT. I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS.
PING
DON'T TOUCH IT, MISS. THERE'S DEATH ON THAT KEY.
GOOD.
WELL, HELLO. YOU'RE FROM THE NORTH, AREN'T YOU, LITTLE ONE?
YES, MA'AM. HOW DID YOU KNOW?
NOT MANY FOXES IN THIS CITY. MOST OF THEM ARE REFUGEES.

DON'T WORRY...
THOSE SOLDIERS WON'T HURT YOU. THERE'S NO SLAVE TRADE HERE.
THE QUEENS OF THYRIA WOULD NEVER ALLOW SUCH MADNESS.
AND WHILE THOSE QUEENS HOLD THE ABYSSAL SEA, NEITHER THE FEDERATION OF MAN NOR THE CUMAEA WOULD DARE--
DON'T FEED THE CHILD LIES.
THYRIA WAS BRUTALLY INVADED ONCE ALREADY BY THE WITCHES. IT CAN HAPPEN AGAIN.
THE WAVE EMPRESS HERSELF SAVED THYRIA DURING THE WAR.
THE CUMAEA WILL NEVER FORGET THAT. THEY NOW FEAR THE GODDESS OF THE DEEP MORE THAN THEY REVERE THEIR FALSE MARIUM.
YOU KNOW NADA, OLD WOMAN. THE CUMAEA LOVE POWER MORE THAN THEY CARE ABOUT ANY GODDESS -- THEIR OWN, OR ANOTHER.
YOU SHOULD ALWAYS MMPH BE CAREFUL WITH WITCHES.
A WOMAN WAS SUPPOSED TO BE LIVING IN THAT HOME BEHIND ME.
CATRIONA DEVOLA. DO YOU KNOW WHERE SHE IS?
OLD CATRI?
SHE LEFT ON PILGRIMAGE. TWO YEARS GONE, SINCE THE SPRING. SOLD HER POSSESSIONS AND WENT TO SEA.
LET'S GO.
MISS? ARE WE GOING TO LOOK FOR THAT WOMAN WHO WENT AWAY?
NOT YET, LITTLE FOX. I HAVE SOMETHING ELSE TO TAKE CARE OF FIRST.
IS IT HER?
YES, YOUR MAJESTY. MORIKO HALFWOLF'S DAUGHTER HAS RETURNED.

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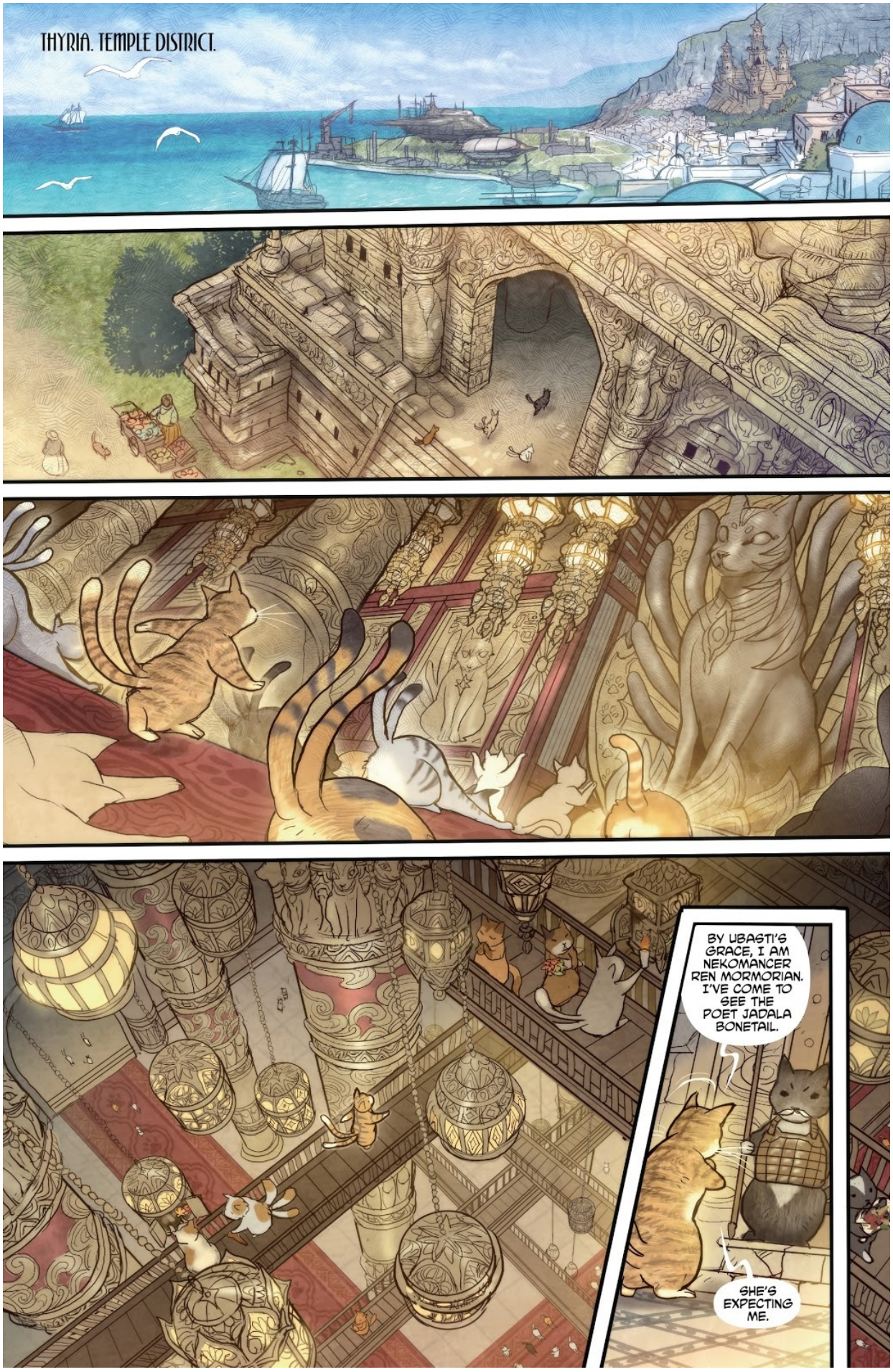
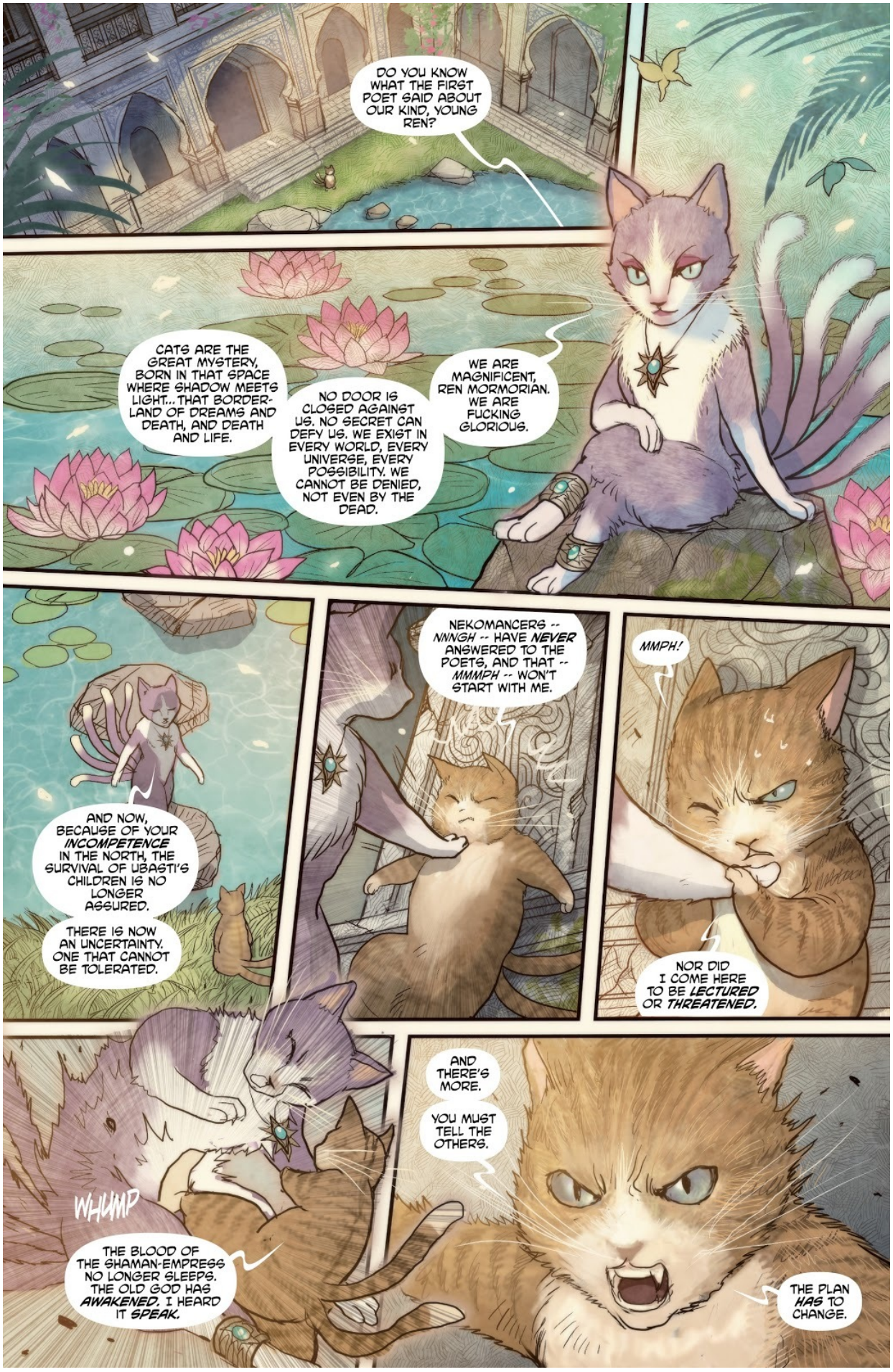
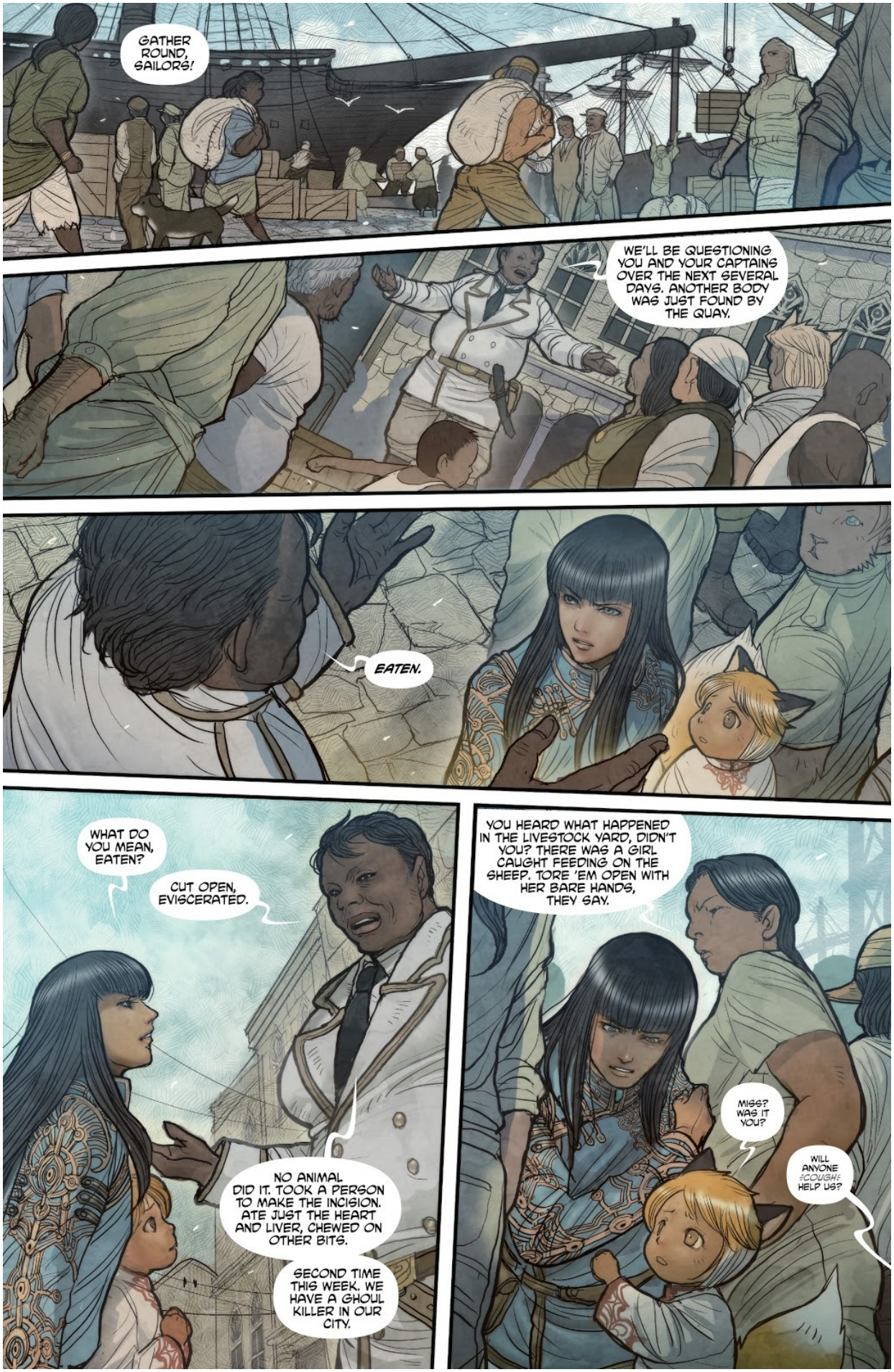
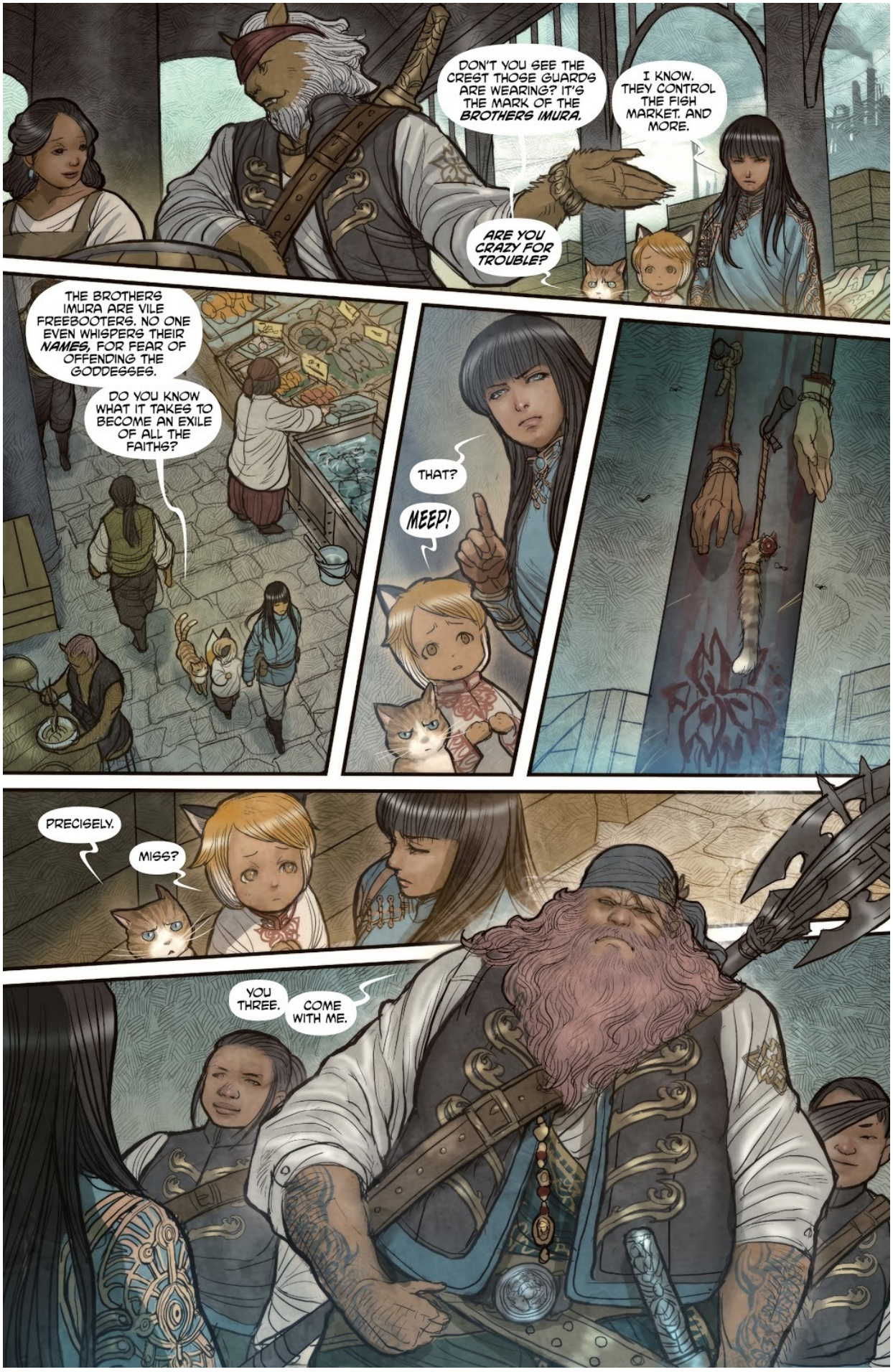

THYRIA. TEMPLE DISTRICT.
BY UBASTI'S GRACE, I AM NEKOMANCER REN MORMORIAN. I'VE COME TO SEE THE POET JADALA BONETAIL.
SHE'S EXPECTING ME.

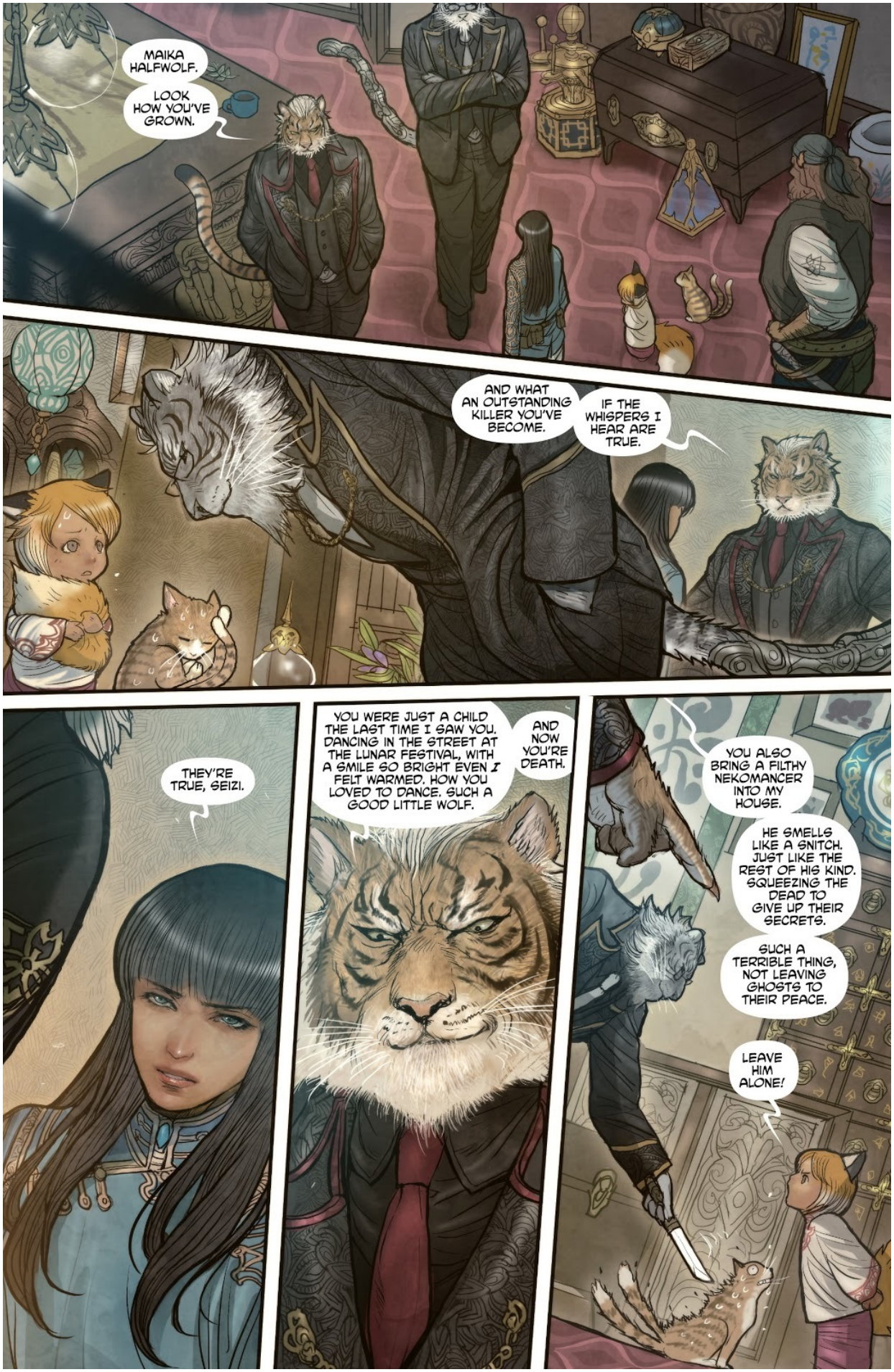

DO YOU KNOW WHAT THE FIRST POET SAID ABOUT OUR KIND, YOUNG REN?
CATS ARE THE GREAT MYSTERY, BORN IN THAT SPACE WHERE SHADOW MEETS LIGHT... THAT BORDERLAND OF DREAMS AND DEATH, AND DEATH AND LIFE.
NO DOOR IS CLOSED AGAINST US. NO SECRET CAN DEFY US. WE EXIST IN EVERY WORLD, EVERY UNIVERSE, EVERY POSSIBILITY. WE CANNOT BE DENIED, NOT EVEN BY THE DEAD.
WE ARE MAGNIFICENT, REN MORMORIAN. WE ARE FUCKING GLORIOUS.
AND NOW, BECAUSE OF YOUR *INCOMPETENCE* IN THE NORTH, THE SURVIVAL OF UBASTI'S CHILDREN IS NO LONGER ASSURED.
THERE IS NOW AN UNCERTAINTY. ONE THAT CANNOT BE TOLERATED.
NEKOMANCERS -- *NNNGH* -- HAVE *NEVER* ANSWERED TO THE POETS, AND THAT -- *MMMPH* -- WON'T START WITH ME.
MMPH!
NOR DID I COME HERE TO BE *LECTURED* OR *THREATENED.*
WHUMP
THE BLOOD OF THE SHAMAN-EMPRESS NO LONGER SLEEPS. THE OLD GOD HAS *AWAKENED.* I HEARD IT *SPEAK.*
AND THERE'S MORE.
YOU MUST TELL THE OTHERS.
THE PLAN *HAS* TO CHANGE.


GATHER ROUND, SAILORS!
WE'LL BE QUESTIONING YOU AND YOUR CAPTAINS OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL DAYS. ANOTHER BODY WAS JUST FOUND BY THE QUAY.
EATEN.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, EATEN?
CUT OPEN, EVISCERATED.
NO ANIMAL DID IT. TOOK A PERSON TO MAKE THE INCISION. ATE JUST THE HEART AND LIVER, CHEWED ON OTHER BITS.
SECOND TIME THIS WEEK. WE HAVE A GHOUL KILLER IN OUR CITY.
YOU HEARD WHAT HAPPENED IN THE LIVESTOCK YARD, DIDN'T YOU? THERE WAS A GIRL CAUGHT FEEDING ON THE SHEEP. TORE 'EM OPEN WITH HER BARE HANDS, THEY SAY.
MIGS? WAS IT YOU?
WILL ANYONE *COUGH* HELP US?

I'M WILLING TO WORK!
MY FATHER WAS A SOLDIER IN THE WAR...BUT THE WITCHES TOOK HIS LEGS...
PLEASE HELP.
MISS! WE HAVE TO --
SHUT UP. JUST... SHUT UP.
MISS, PLEASE. YOU MADE SO MUCH MONEY FROM SELLING SIR CORVIN'S SWIFT. CAN'T WE SPARE SOME?
SORRY, LITTLE FOX, BUT WE MIGHT NEED ALL OUR COIN BEFORE WE'RE THROUGH.
JUST BECAUSE YOU ARE AFRAID YOU WON'T HAVE ANYTHING TOMORROW DOESN'T MEAN YOU SHOULDN'T HELP PEOPLE TODAY.
WEREN'T YOU EVER HUNGRY AND ALONE? DIDN'T SOMEONE HELP YOU?
I'M ALWAYS HUNGRY, KIPPA.
KIPPA!
MASTER REN! YOU FOUND US!
BARELY IN TIME. WHAT ARE YOU BOTH DOING HERE?

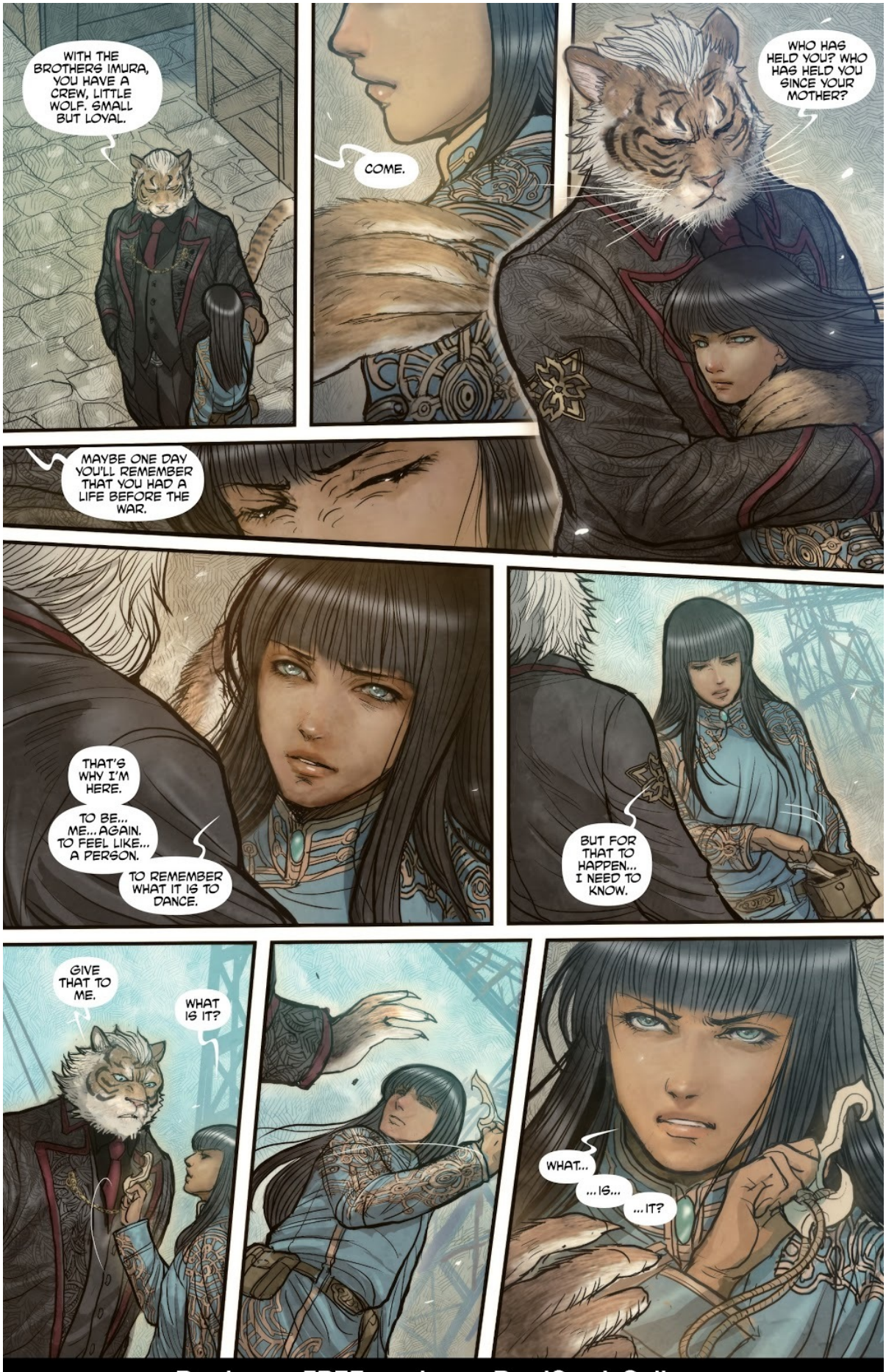

DON'T YOU SEE THE CREST THOSE GUARDS ARE WEARING? IT'S THE MARK OF THE BROTHERS IMURA.
I KNOW. THEY CONTROL THE FISH MARKET. AND MORE.
ARE YOU CRAZY FOR TROUBLE?
THE BROTHERS IMURA ARE VILE FREEBOOTERS. NO ONE EVEN WHISPERS THEIR NAMES, FOR FEAR OF OFFENDING THE GODDESSES.
DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT TAKES TO BECOME AN EXILE OF ALL THE FAITHS?
THAT?
MEEP!
PRECISELY.
MISS?
YOU THREE.
COME WITH ME.

"HOW FAR WILL SHE SAIL?"
"TO THE FARTHEST SHORE, SIR. SHE'S BUILT FOR BOTH CAPACITY AND DISTANCE."
EASY ENOUGH TO CLAIM, BUT EVERY CREW THAT ATTEMPTS THE JOURNEY DIES OF THIRST OR HUNGER. THERE'S NO LAND TO THE EAST, MASTER-BUILDER. NOTHING CLOSE ENOUGH TO KEEP MY PEOPLE ALIVE. EVEN THE LATEST AIRSHIPS CAN'T MAKE THE JOURNEY.
THIS VESSEL IS DIFFERENT, SIR.
ITS SIZE IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE PROBLEM OF MAINTAINING THE CREW UNTIL THEY CAN REACH THE LOST CONTINENT. WE'VE FOUND A WAY TO BUILD COLD BOXES INTO THE LOWER --
MY APOLOGIES, MASTER-BUILDER. WE'LL HAVE TO CONTINUE THIS MEETING AN HOUR FROM NOW.
SOUFIAN, PLEASE ESCORT OUR GUEST TO THE CANTEEN. OUR BEST WINE FOR HER, PLEASE.


MAIKA HALFWOLF.
LOOK HOW YOU'VE GROWN.
IF THE WHISPERS I HEAR ARE TRUE.
AND WHAT AN OUTSTANDING KILLER YOU'VE BECOME.
THEY'RE TRUE, SEIZI.
YOU WERE JUST A CHILD THE LAST TIME I SAW YOU. DANCING IN THE STREET AT THE LUNAR FESTIVAL, WITH A SMILE SO BRIGHT EVEN I FELT WARMED. HOW YOU LOVED TO DANCE. SUCH A GOOD LITTLE WOLF.
AND NOW YOU'RE DEATH.
YOU ALSO BRING A FILTHY NEKOMANCER INTO MY HOUSE.
HE SMELLS LIKE A SNITCH. JUST LIKE THE REST OF HIS KIND. SQUEEZING THE DEAD TO GIVE UP THEIR SECRETS.
SUCH A TERRIBLE THING, NOT LEAVING GHOSTS TO THEIR PEACE.
LEAVE HIM ALONE!

I DON'T TRUST HIM, EITHER. BUT HE'S BEEN USEFUL. HE'LL BE LESS USEFUL IF KENZI UNTAILS HIM.
THERE'S NO ROOM AT SEA FOR ANYTHING LESS THAN ABSOLUTE LOYALTY. TRUST IS THE SAME AS BLOOD. THAT'S A LESSON YOUR MOTHER LEARNED TOO LATE.
OH, UBASTI, PLEASE.
LET US GO FOR A JAUNT, YOUNG WOLF, AND YOU CAN TELL ME WHY YOU'RE HERE.
BROTHER KENZI... FIND OUT WHAT YOU CAN FROM THE NEKOMANCER. MAKE SURE HE'S NOT HIDING ANYTHING. SAVE THE TAILS...FOR LATER.
MISS! STOP HIM!
HAVE YOUR GUARD TAKE THE LITTLE FOX OUT FOR LUNCH. SHE'S... SENTIMENTAL. AND IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO HER... HE DIES.
PHYLLEAS? YOU LOOKING TO DIE?
NOT TODAY, BOSS.
NO, THIS IS WRONG! DON'T LET MASTER REN BE TORTURED!
HE BETRAYED ME TO THE DUSK COURT. YES OR NO?
I THOUGHT SO.
IT'S NOT RIGHT, MISS.

I'M GETTING SOFT. I MISS THE OCEAN, AND THE BLOOD. I SHOULD NEVER HAVE STOPPED PIRATING, BUT KENZI WASN'T THE SAME AFTER WHAT THE SEA FOLK DID TO HIM.
I CAN'T BE OUT THERE WITHOUT HIM. HE'S ALWAYS BEEN OUR LUCK.
BUT I SOOTHE MY LOSS WITH THE OBSCENE AMOUNTS OF COIN OUR LITTLE TRADE EMPIRE MAKES.
I AM THE UNLIKELIEST OF GODDESS-FATHERS, YOU KNOW. I'M NOT SURE WHAT YOUR MOTHER WAS THINKING WHEN YOU WERE BORN. EXCEPT THAT I WAS THERE, AND CAUGHT YOU.
WE WERE AT SEA, ON MY SHIP.
WHEN I HEARD MORIKO HAD DIED...
... AND THEN I COULDN'T FIND YOU... NOT UNTIL YOU RETURNED THREE YEARS AGO...
YOUR ARM. MORE OF IT IS MISSING.
I MADE A MISTAKE.


WITH THE BROTHERS IMURA, YOU HAVE A CREW, LITTLE WOLF. SMALL BUT LOYAL.
COME.
WHO HAS HELD YOU? WHO HAS HELD YOU SINCE YOUR MOTHER?
MAYBE ONE DAY YOU'LL REMEMBER THAT YOU HAD A LIFE BEFORE THE WAR.
THAT'S WHY I'M HERE.
TO BE... ME... AGAIN. TO FEEL LIKE... A PERSON.
TO REMEMBER WHAT IT IS TO DANCE.
BUT FOR THAT TO HAPPEN... I NEED TO KNOW.
GIVE THAT TO ME.
WHAT IS IT?
WHAT...
...IS...
...IT?

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IT'S FROM THE ISLE OF BONES. ONLY THOSE WITH A KEY CAN SURVIVE THAT ACCURSED ATOLL. YOUR MOTHER TOLD ME SHE LOST IT.
AND YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS KEY HOW? THE TRUTH NOW.
BECAUSE YOUR MOTHER WENT THERE. SEEKING ANSWERS.
FROM WHO?
NO ONE KNOWS WHAT POWER RULES THAT ISLE. YOUR MOTHER NEVER SPOKE OF HER JOURNEY.
YOU TOOK HER, DIDN'T YOU?
I WISH I'D REFUSED HER. MORIKO LOST SOMETHING OF HERSELF IN THAT PLACE. SURVIVING EXACTED A PRICE.
THERE WON'T BE ANYTHING LEFT OF ME IF I KEEP PAYING WHAT IT TAKES TO SURVIVE.
I'M RUNNING OUT OF TIME.
WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU, LITTLE WOLF? I HEAR THE WHISPERS, BUT IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE.
THE DUSK COURT IS HUNTING YOU. WITCHES ARE HUNTING YOU.
WILL YOU HELP ME OR NOT?
BOSS.
THYRIAN SOLDIERS HAVE ENTERED THE WAREHOUSE. THE BLOOD QUEEN IS WITH THEM. SHE SEEKS THE HALFWOLF.
THE BLOOD QUEEN? SHE KNOWS BETTER THAN TO COME HERE.
THE PACK THAT HUNTS YOU, WOLF, GROWS BIGGER.
PHYLLEAS! GET THE NEKOMANCER. BRING HIM TO THE JOLLY RAVAGER.
SO, YOUNG WOLF. IT APPEARS I'M GIVING YOU A SHIP, AFTER ALL.

THE JOLLY RAVAGER IS MY FINEST SHIP, AND HER CAPTAIN AND CREW ARE WITHOUT PEER. ALL OF THEM FOUGHT WITH ME IN THAT LAST BATTLE OF KEELSTONE REEF.
WHEN IT'S TIME TO MAKE THE BLASTED JOURNEY TO THE LOST CONTINENT, IT'LL BE THEM I WILL SAIL WITH. IF KENZI CAN BE PERSUADED, THAT IS.
MOVE YOUR ASSES! COMMANDER IMURA IS COMING ABOARD, AND WE NEED TO SET SAIL!
THE GULL SHOULD HAVE ALREADY RELAYED MY ORDERS, SYRYSSA.
I CAN'T SAY I'M PLEASED BY THE COURSE WE'RE SETTING. THAT'S BAD LUCK, SEIZI -- THE WAVE EMPRESS DOESN'T TAKE KINDLY TO HASTY FOOLS.
I'M THE FOOL. AND *I'M* ALSO THE REASON FOR THE HASTE.
THAT IS MORIKO HALFWOLF'S DAUGHTER.
WELL, WE *ARE* FUCKED, AREN'T WE?
LAUGH LATER. SHE'S BEING HUNTED BY THE CUMAEA *AND* THE DUSK COURT. WHICH MEANS *WE* ARE NOW BEING HUNTED.
THE BLOOD QUEEN HERSELF WANTS A WORD WITH MY GODDESS-DAUGHTER. I'LL FIND OUT WHETHER IT'S JUST WORDS, OR HER HEAD. BUT IN THE MEANTIME...
LET THEM ALL CHASE US.
I HAVE STARED INTO THE EYES OF THE WAVE EMPRESS, SEIZI. NOTHING ELSE CAN FRIGHTEN ME.

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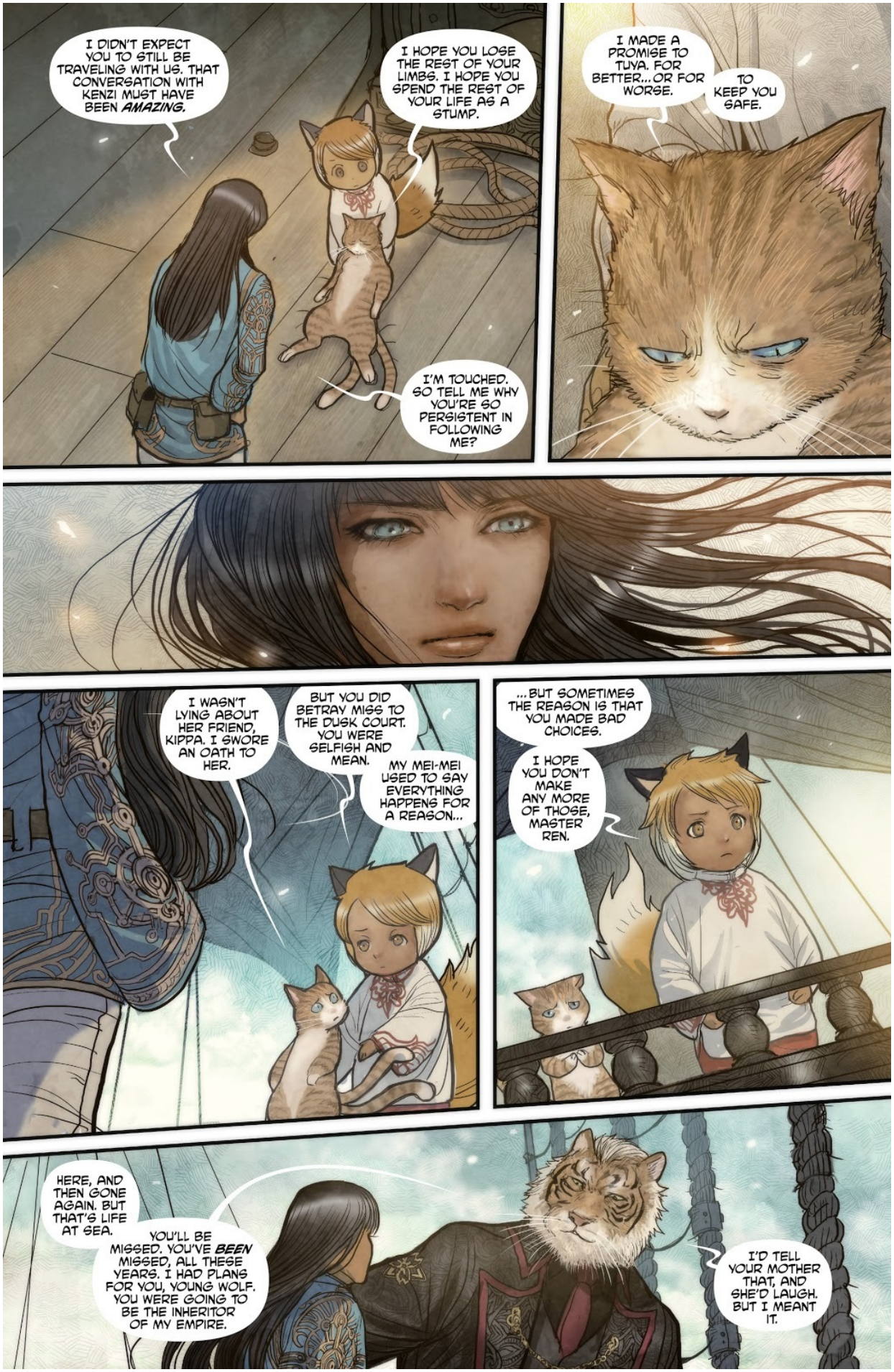
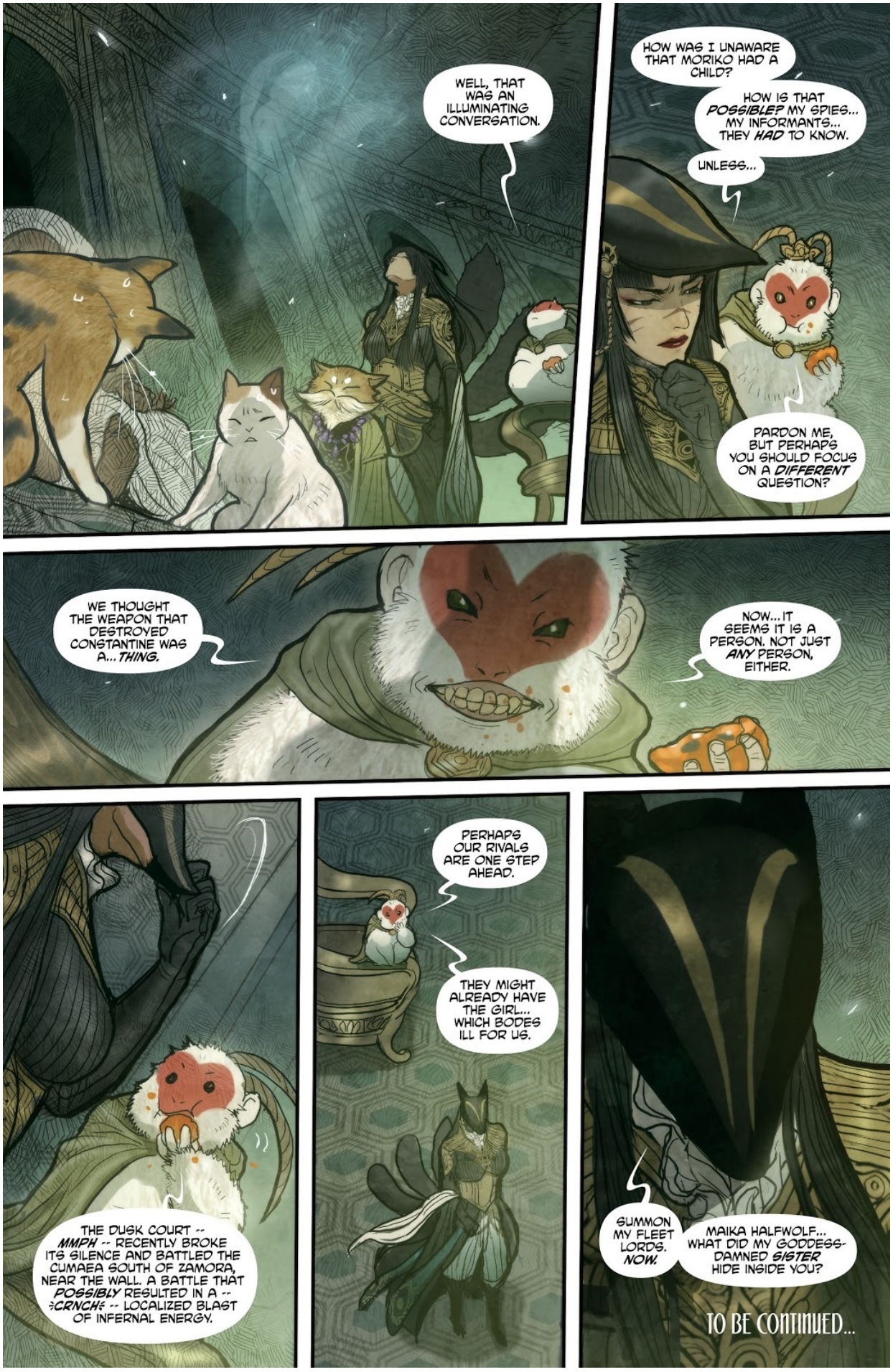

I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO STILL BE TRAVELING WITH US. THAT CONVERSATION WITH KENZI MUST HAVE BEEN *AMAZING.*
I HOPE YOU LOSE THE REST OF YOUR LIMBS. I HOPE YOU SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE AS A STUMP.
I'M TOUCHED. SO TELL ME WHY YOU'RE SO PERSISTENT IN FOLLOWING ME?
I MADE A PROMISE TO TUYA. FOR BETTER... OR FOR WORSE.
TO KEEP YOU SAFE.
I WASN'T LYING ABOUT HER FRIEND, KIPPA. I SWORE AN OATH TO HER.
BUT YOU DID BETRAY MIGS TO THE DUSK COURT. YOU WERE SELFISH AND MEAN.
MY MEI-MEI USED TO SAY EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON...
...BUT SOMETIMES THE REASON IS THAT YOU MADE BAD CHOICES.
I HOPE YOU DON'T MAKE ANY MORE OF THOSE, MASTER REN.
HERE, AND THEN GONE AGAIN. BUT THAT'S LIFE AT SEA.
YOU'LL BE MISSED. YOU'VE *BEEN* MISSED, ALL THESE YEARS. I HAD PLANS FOR YOU, YOUNG WOLF. YOU WERE GOING TO BE THE INHERITOR OF MY EMPIRE.
I'D TELL YOUR MOTHER THAT, AND SHE'D LAUGH. BUT I MEANT IT.

I... MISSED YOU, TOO. I JUST DIDN'T THINK... I COULD STAY. I WASN'T THE SAME AFTER THE WAR. I'M NOT THE SAME NOW. I'M... UNSAFE.
EVERYTHING I HAVE CAME FROM YEARS OF RUTHLESS MURDER. AM I SAFE? NO.
BUT I LOVE. I AM LOYAL. AND THAT IS MY REDEMPTION.
IF IT IS SO FOR ME... THEN WHY NOT YOU?
I HAVE ANOTHER FAVOR TO ASK. THERE ARE NAMES ON THE BACK OF THIS PHOTOGRAPH. I NEED TO FIND THE OTHER CHILD AND CATRIONA, MY OLD NURSEMAID. I'M TOLD SHE WENT TO SEA.
I'LL DO MY BEST.
ONE MORE THING, THOUGH.
YOU'VE BEEN SILENT ABOUT THE DAWN COURT. IF THESE OTHER POWERS ARE HUNTING YOU... WHY HAVEN'T YOU GONE TO THE SWORD OF THE EAST FOR HELP?
MY MOTHER MADE ME SWEAR AN OATH NEVER TO GO NEAR HER.
YOUR MOTHER WAS SALTY ABOUT THE DAWN COURT FOR GOOD REASONS. BUT YOU DON'T HAVE TO CARRY HER GRUDGE.
YOU NEED ALLIES, LITTLE WOLF.
IF YOU DON'T GO TO THE WARLORD... SHE WILL COME TO YOU. MARK MY WORDS.

I DO SO LOVE WATCHING THE DEAD RISE.
WHAT A *TREAT.*

UBASTI OM DOMA. UBASTI OM AMOD.
SPEAK AS OUR LADY WARLORD COMMANDS...
...AND YOU SHALL BE FREED TO YOUR GODDESS FOR YOUR REBIRTH UPON THIS WORLD...OR ANOTHER.
...MURDERERS...
...YOU MURDERED US...
...YOU STOLE US FROM OUR LIVES...
...WHY...
...WHY...
...WHY...
CONSTANTINE.
YOU SURVIVED THE HEART OF THE BLAST.
TELL ME HOW.
YOU *MUST* ANSWER. THE SWORD OF THE EAST COMPELS YOU TO SPEAK.

...WE DON'T...
...KNOW HOW...
...WE SURVIVED...
...BUT WE KNOW...
...WHO SAVED US...
...MAIKA... HALFWOLF...
OH, MY.
MAIKA HALFWOLF?
THERE IS ONLY ONE HALFWOLF, LITTLE FOOLS, AND HER NAME IS MORIKO.
...YOU ARE... THE FOOL...
...MORIKO HAD... A DAUGHTER...
...A DAUGHTER... WHO WILL... REMAKE...
...THE WORLD...
YOU LIE.
IT IS AN UNFORTUNATE FACT OF LIFE THAT THE DEAD ONLY SPEAK THE TRUTH.
BUT SUPREME WARLORD, YOU MUST HURRY WITH YOUR QUESTIONS. THE NEKOMANCERS CANNOT HOLD THEM MUCH LONGER. THESE GHOSTS ARE UNUSUALLY STRONG.
FINE.
DID THIS... MAIKA HALFWOLF... DESTROY CONSTANTINE? DID MORIKO GIVE HER THE WEAPON?
...YOU ARE... TWICE... THE FOOL...
...THERE IS NO WEAPON... ONLY MAIKA HALFWOLF...
...SHE... ENDED... THE WAR...
...AND HAS ALREADY... BEGUN... ANOTHER...
...YOU WILL NOT BE... THE SWORD OF THE EAST... FOR MUCH LONGER...


WELL, THAT WAS AN ILLUMINATING CONVERSATION.
HOW WAS I UNAWARE THAT MORIKO HAD A CHILD?
HOW IS THAT *POSSIBLE?* MY SPIES... MY INFORMANTS... THEY *HAD* TO KNOW.
UNLESS...
PARDON ME, BUT PERHAPS YOU SHOULD FOCUS ON A *DIFFERENT* QUESTION?
WE THOUGHT THE WEAPON THAT DESTROYED CONSTANTINE WAS A... *THING.*
NOW... IT SEEMS IT IS A PERSON. NOT JUST *ANY* PERSON, EITHER.
THE DUSK COURT -- *MMPH* -- RECENTLY BROKE ITS SILENCE AND BATTLED THE CUMAEA SOUTH OF ZAMORA, NEAR THE WALL. A BATTLE THAT *POSSIBLY* RESULTED IN A -- *CRNCH* -- LOCALIZED BLAST OF INFERNAL ENERGY.
PERHAPS OUR RIVALS ARE ONE STEP AHEAD.
THEY MIGHT ALREADY HAVE THE GIRL... WHICH BODES ILL FOR US.
SUMMON MY FLEET LORDS. *NOW.*
MAIKA HALFWOLF... WHAT DID MY GODDESS-DAMNED *SISTER* HIDE INSIDE YOU?
TO BE CONTINUED...

An excerpt of a lecture from the esteemed **Professor Tam Tam**, former First Record-Keeper of the Is'hami Temple, and learned contemporary of Namron Black Claw...

THYRIA HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SACRED CITY FOR THE OCEAN CULTURES OF OUR WORLD. IT IS BELIEVED THAT ON THYRIA'S VERY COAST THE WAVE EMPRESS, THE GODDESS OF THE DEEP, FIRST SENT AN EMBASSY TO THE PEOPLES ABOVE. WHETHER THIS LEGEND IS TRUE OR NOT, THYRIA HAS LONG BEEN A CONTACT ZONE BETWEEN THOSE WHO WALK THE KNOWN WORLD... AND ALL WHO INHABIT THE *UNKNOWN* WORLD BENEATH THE WAVES.
AND WHILE THERE ARE OTHER CITIES, MARVELOUS AND WEALTHY, THAT PRESS AGAINST THE SEA, NONE ARE CONTROLLED BY MORTAL WOMEN ANNOINTED BY THE WAVE EMPRESS HERSELF: *THE PIRATE QUEENS OF THYRIA.*
FOR THESE REASONS IT WAS SAID THAT ANYONE WHO ATTACKED THYRIA WOULD FACE THE WRATH OF THE WAVE EMPRESS, WHO IS THE OLDEST OF THE DIVINE. THE CUMAEA, HOWEVER, DID NOT HEED THE OLD STORIES. THE MOTHER SUPERIOR ORDERED THYRIA BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO FURTHER ISOLATE THE DAWN AND DUSK COURTS.
THE FEDERATION NAVY ALONE, OF ALL THE BRANCHES OF THE MILITARY, BALKED AT THE INVASION PLAN. THOSE CAPTAINS ARGUED THE RISKS WERE TOO GREAT, AND MANY A CAT BELIEVE IT WAS THEIR FEAR OF THE WAVE EMPRESS THAT DROVE THEIR DISSENT.
SO, UNABLE TO RELY ON THE FEDERATION NAVY, THE CUMAEA LED THE INVASION OF THYRIA THEMSELVES -- BY AIR.
THE QUEENS OF THRYIA WERE VASTLY OUTGUNNED AND HAD NO AIRSHIPS OF THEIR OWN, BUT STILL THEY REFUSED TO ACCEPT TERMS OF SURRENDER. THE QUEENS RALLIED EVERY MERCHANT SAIL, EVERY CORSAIR, EVERY ABLE-BODIED ARCANIC -- EVEN THE REFUGEES -- AND FOR SIX DAYS AND SIX NIGHTS THEY HELD THE CITY AGAINST THE FEDERATION.
THYRIA BECAME A VISION OF HELL ITSELF. HALF THE CITY WAS ALIGHT, AND ITS FAMED STREETS AND MARKETS WERE STREWN WITH BURNING BOMBARDED FLESH -- WHILE THE SEAS BOILED AND HISSED WITH THE FIRE OF DROWNING SHIPS. THE FEDERATION AND CUMAEA COMMITTED UNTOLD ATROCITIES -- MOTHERS AND ELDERS WERE BAYONETTED INTO PITS. CATS WERE SKINNED ALIVE IN THE TEMPLE OF UBASTI, UPON THE SACRED ALTAR. ARCANIC INFANTS, TOO SMALL TO BE VALUABLE FOR THEIR LILIUM, WERE THROWN INTO BONFIRES.
FOR ALL THE COURAGE OF ITS CITIZENS, BY DAY SIX THYRIA COULD NOT STOP THE FEDERATION FROM SEIZING THE CITY. IT WAS ONLY THEN, WHEN ALL HOPE SEEMED LOST, THAT THE PRAYERS OF THE QUEENS WERE ANSWERED: BY A TYPHOON THE LIKES OF WHICH HAD NEVER BEEN RECORDED IN THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE ABYSSAL SEA.
SO TALL WERE THE WAVES, SURVIVORS REPORTED, IT WAS AS IF THE SEA HAD DECIDED TO DROWN THE ENTIRE WORLD. THE GALE FLATTENED ENTIRE QUARTERS. TWO DAYS IT LASTED, AND WHEN FINALLY THE THYRIANS COULD LEAVE THEIR SHELTERS THEY FOUND EVERY FEDERATION AIRSHIP DESTROYED -- ALL THE INVADERS, DROWNED. THYRIA, THOUGH RAVAGED, WAS SAVED.
YOUNG ONES, TAKE HEED: NOTHING IS SACRED. NOT EVEN THE DIVINE.
BUT REMEMBER, TOO: GODDESSES KEEP THEIR PROMISES.
AND THEIR MEMORIES ARE ETERNAL.

DEAR READERS,

When Sana Takeda and I began this journey, we didn't know where it would lead — only that we had a story to tell, and the story mattered, and it was a chance to create something together that we loved. It's not often in this world that you have the opportunity to so freely and fiercely make what your heart desires, and see that manifest in a way that you can share with others. It feels a bit like literary telepathy: when you read MONSTRESS, you're reading our minds, reading our dreams, across vast distances of time and space.

Some of you may have met us over the summer. Sana and I were so excited to tour the West Coast together. It was our first time traveling as a team, and our first stop was **San Diego Comic-Con**, where we met so many wonderful readers (you are seriously the best) and after that we traveled to Seattle (my hometown), Berkeley, and San Francisco. Tremendous thanks to the **University of Washington Bookstore**, **Books, Inc.**, **Comix Experience,** and **Kinokuniya** for being such lovely and welcoming hosts. We had an amazing time. Simply put: we love our readers, and everyone in the comic shops and bookstores who work so hard to sell our books — to sell any books. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

Finally, one of the most frequent questions we received this summer was: "How long will you and Sana be working on MONSTRESS?"

My friends, we hope to have the chance to keep working together until the story is complete. And given the plans we have in place, that won't be for some time yet. There is a war looming and Maika's quest continues, as does that of her companions, Kippa and Ren.

To quote the poets: *It ain't over, till it's over.*

Marjorie Liu

SDCC Booth Team! Marjorie Liu, Ceri Riley, Shelby Pefley, Sana Takeda, Aki Yanagi.

Sana Takeda and **Marjorie Liu** at SDCC.

Team Monstress lands in Seattle!

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